

SUMMARY

TEACHING STREET CHILDREN IN A SCHOOL CONTEXT: SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

This study investigated the psychological approach and the classroom methodology needed by an educator to teach street children effectively in a special school created for them. Street children with their psychological trauma, their independent, self-sufficient outlook and educational deprivation make their adaption to the methods and educational environment of mainstream schooling difficult. To meet the special educational, psychological and emotional needs of street children, Masupatsela School was started. The study was carried out in this school.

The qualitative research methodology used an action research design which consisted of a reconnaissance phase and three cycles. Each cycle made use of a planning, implementation and evaluation phase. A general plan was formulated after the reconnaissance phase and revised after each cycle. The teaching was done by the researcher using four grades of street children ranging from grade 7 to grade 10.

Because of their specific psychological makeup, street children, who have lacked close, comforting and trusting relationships and role models, require a classroom environment, atmosphere and a relationship with the educator which is supportive, caring, warm and firm. To achieve this a client centred approach was used based predominantly on the therapeutic principles of congruence, empathetic understanding and unconditional positive regard. The interaction with the children was based on openness, tolerance, the affirmation of others and honest firmness. The teaching methodology was an eclectic one which made use primarily of a cognitive teaching style which was introduced incrementally over the three cycles. The main components of this style consisted of cognitive questioning, cooperative learning and strategic reading for information.

The results of the study showed that both the psychological and educational approach in the classroom to be very appropriate and successful. However the wider negative contextual influences such as the school organization, staffing and curriculum made the classroom strategies difficult to sustain. It is recommended that a programme using these educational and psychological approaches and incorporating functional literacy and numeracy, vocational skills, recreation and a therapeutic programme be incorporated when designing a programme for street children in a formal setting.

